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ABSTRACT

The description of achievement levels is important to the process of reporting student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A process was designed to develop achievement level descriptions (ALDs) for writing and civics. To begin, focus groups were conducted in each of the four NAEP regions for both writing and civics. Panels consisted of a mix of teachers, nonteacher educators, and general public members with 70 to 75 percent educators. The focus groups discussed preliminary versions of ALDs. The process worked well for writing focus groups, but not as well for civics focus groups. For the later focus groups, civic groups members were asked to recommend more general umbrella statements for the ALDs. Recommendations from the focus groups were reviewed by expert review panels, which modified the proposed ALDs. Original focus groups were asked to review the modified ALDs, and experts who participated in the development of the assessment were also asked to comment. The final versions were approved by the National Assessment Governing Board for pilot testing. Exhibits contain survey questionnaires. (Contains eight tables and four exhibits.) (SLD)

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Setting Standards for the 1998 NAEP in Civics and Writing:
Using Focus Groups to Finalize the Achievement Levels Descriptions

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Introduction

The description of achievement levels is critically important to the process of reporting student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) has adopted general policy definitions of three achievement levels – Basic, Proficient, and Advanced – that apply to all academic subjects at all grade levels tested by NAEP. NAGB has been charged by Congress to generate achievement levels that are "useful, reasonable, and valid" (Public Law 103-382, *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994)*. The development of achievement levels descriptions (ALDs) is an important part of this mandate.

Preliminary achievement levels descriptions were developed for writing and civics as part of the 1998 Assessment Frameworks. The preliminary ALDs are more specific than the generic NAGB policy definitions in that they operationally define student performance in the content areas assessed. The preliminary ALDs are statements of what students should know and be able to do at each of the achievement levels at 4^{th}, 8^{th}, and 12^{th} grades for civics and writing.

Past Procedures Modified

In the past, the job of developing the ALDs was one of three major tasks carried out by panelists participating in the achievement levels-setting (ALS) sessions. Their responsibilities included:

1. Determining content-based descriptions of each level of achievement for each of the three grades assessed by NAEP;
2. Determining numerical cutpoints on the assessment that tied these descriptions to performance on NAEP; and
3. Determining items that illustrate the skills and knowledge characterizing student performance at each of the three achievement levels at each of the three grades assessed by NAEP in these subjects.

For the 1998 NAEP, these duties were altered. Instead of ALS panelists fulfilling the first task of determining the ALDs for the 1998 NAEP, the achievement levels descriptions were finalized *before* convening the ALS participants. ACT designed a series of expert discussions and reviews that resulted in modifications and refinement of the preliminary ALDs prior to convening the ALS panels. Panelists engaged in the ALS process no longer were responsible for modifying and refining the ALDs. This is an improvement in the ALS process over the previously used method for several reasons:

- It reduced the time required of panelists in an already full ALS schedule.
- It decreased the cognitive demands placed on panelists during the ALS session.
- It allowed more time to deliberate and develop the ALDs.
- It involved more stakeholders in the process of developing the ALDs.
- It enabled evaluation of the ALDs before they were used in the ALS process.

Plan for Developing Achievement Levels Descriptions for the 1998 NAEP

NAGB' fundamental approach to setting achievement levels is based on collecting opinions from a broadly representative sample of knowledgeable constituents who are invited to become involved in the ALS process. In keeping with NAGB's consensus-building approach to setting achievement levels for NAEP, ACT designed a method to conduct a series of expert reviews and discussions of the preliminary ALDs.

The process of developing the ALDs involved several steps:

1. Focus groups recommended improvements to the preliminary ALDs.
2. Expert review panels modified the ALDs after considering the focus groups' recommendations.
3. Opinions of the revised ALDs were collected from key individuals who had been involved in the development of the NAEP for civics and writing.
4. The coverage of the content areas outlined in the Civics Framework was analyzed according to the revised Civics ALDs.
5. The coverage of the Civics Item Pool was analyzed according to the revised Civics ALDs.

The review by focus groups involved a broad segment of the population to evaluate the preliminary descriptions. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine whether the descriptions appeared to be both useful and reasonable. The judgment of "reasonableness" was with respect to the NAGB policy definitions of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The results of the focus groups' evaluation were reviewed by content experts in writing and civics, who modified the ALDs accordingly. The revised ALDs were reviewed further by several different groups of informed stakeholders, including the original focus group members. The content coverage described by the revised Civics ALDs was compared with the content areas contained in the Civics Framework and Civics Item Pool. After extensive review and evaluation, ACT recommended the revised ALDs to NAGB for approval. A more detailed explanation follows of the plan that was implemented for developing the ALDs for the 1998 NAEP.

Step 1: The Focus Groups

Participants. Abt Associates Inc., under contract to ACT, conducted focus groups in each of the four NAEP regions for both writing and civics. A total of eight focus groups were held. The process for identifying focus group participants was similar to ACT's design for recruiting ALS panelists. Panels consisted of a mix of teachers, nonteacher educators, and general public members with 70-75% educators and 25-30% noneducators. Please see Tables 1 and 2 for the composition of the focus groups.

In order to assure representation of important attributes among the panelists, the following guidelines were used in drawing the panel members:

- Six classroom teachers (two per grade)
- Three or four non-teacher educators (not more than two per grade)
- One to three members of the general public (not more than one per grade)
- Maximized variation of geographic areas within each NAEP region
- Equal gender balance
- Proportional ethnic and cultural diversity

Educators were nominated by directors of assessment and testing for each state in which focus groups were held: Massachusetts, Georgia, Missouri, and Washington. Nominations also were submitted by appropriate staff and faculty at major teaching colleges and universities. Sources for nominations for members of the general public included civic organizations such as the League of Women Voters, the Bar Association, journalists, education editors for major newspapers, and informal networking.

Each focus group consisted of ten to twelve members. Participants were required to be familiar with the knowledge and skills in either writing or civics that are typically possessed by students in at least one of the grades tested by NAEP. In addition, focus group members were required to be trained in the subject matter tested by NAEP or have related work experience in the area.

Focus Group Sessions. Members received extensive advance materials to assist them in reviewing and understanding the ALDs before the meetings were convened. The sessions were lead by an experienced

focus group facilitator from Abt Associates. The meetings were held on Saturdays in November, December and January (1998-1999) and each lasted between three and four hours.

The meeting format included a discussion of three main questions:

1. Given the NAGB policy definitions of the three achievement levels (solid academic performance, partial mastery, and superior performance) are the descriptions *reasonable* statements of what students should know and be able to do at each grade?
2. Are the statements *useful* in describing student performance? That is, are they effective in communicating student performance?
3. Given what you know about students, are the achievement level descriptions *reasonable* statements of what students should know and be able to do at each NAEP grade level?

After a general group discussion of these questions, focus group members made specific recommendations that were intended to improve each description, at each grade, for each achievement level. The recommendations were summarized and reviewed by the entire group. Final corrections and revisions to the recommendations were discussed and recorded before the meeting was adjourned.

This approach appeared to work well for the writing focus groups, but not as well for the civics groups. Because the preliminary ALDs for civics had been written as long lists of very specific statements, civics group members had difficulty distinguishing these from test items. They were inclined to discuss the ALDs as if they were test questions. Members tended to make recommendations on how to restate specific descriptions rather than to make recommendations on how to combine and summarize the descriptions. After two sessions, ACT decided to change the task somewhat for the civics focus groups.

The procedures previously outlined for facilitating the focus groups were followed for the last two meetings with one exception. In St. Louis and Portland, members of the civics focus groups were asked to recommend more general, broad, "umbrella-type" statements for the ALDs. To do this, members worked in small grade groups to generate the recommendations based on the following questions:

- Is this description essential for solid performance? (Partial mastery? Superior performance?)
- If this description were omitted, would the sense of solid performance be lost? (Partial mastery? Superior performance?)
- Which elements can be combined to make the statements more useful?

This change in procedures for the civics focus groups seemed to help members produce recommendations that were more relevant to the work of the Civics Expert Review Panel. Overall, the eight focus groups produced an abundance of rich, qualitative information about the preliminary ALDs. A complete set of recommendations by focus groups was compiled in each city. The following is a brief summary of the general recommendations made by the all of the focus groups.

General Recommendations from the Writing Focus Groups:

- The descriptions in general are too high for first draft writing.
- Basic in particular is too high for 4th and 8th grades, but is about right for 12th grade.
- Advanced for 12th grade should be higher.
- The statements need to describe a clearer progression of writing skills across levels and grades.
- The statements are too vague. They need to be more specific and use examples.
- The statements need to use simpler, clearer language.

General Recommendations from the Civics Focus Groups:

- Basic is too high for all grade because it denotes more than "partial mastery."
- The content described in Basic is too difficult, especially at the 4th grade.

- Advanced is truly "superior performance" for 4th and 8th grades.
- The statements need to describe a clearer progression of civics skill development across levels and grades.
- The statements need to use simpler, clearer language. The language is inflated and most statements are too complex.
- The descriptions for 4th grade should be based on concrete experiences that involve home, school, and community. The statements for 4th grade describe concepts that are too abstract to be developmentally appropriate.
- The level of detail is inconsistent. In particular, the descriptions for 12th grade are very broad, whereas for 8th grade they are very specific.
- There seems to be a gap between the performance described for 8th grade and 12th grade.

Step 2: The Expert Review Panels (ERP)
Within a few weeks of the last of the focus group meetings, the Expert Review Panels (ERP) for Civics and Writing met to review the recommendations from the focus groups. The Expert Review Panels included members from the NAEP Framework Panels, the NAEP Item Development Committees, and the NAEP Standing Committees for each content area. The Writing ERP consisted of five experts, three of whom attended the meeting, and the Civics ERP consisted of eight experts, seven of whom attended. All but one ERP member participated in a focus group meeting, and at least one ERP member was present at each focus group session.

The Expert Review Panel Process. Members received advance materials that included all of the information utilized during the focus group sessions in addition to a summary report of the comments and recommendations generated by the focus groups. The ERP meetings were held on weekends and lasted for either two or three days.

The ERP meeting format included the following procedures:
1. The ERP reviewed and discussed the preliminary ALDs and the recommendations offered by the focus groups. The review was *very* thorough; every recommendation was considered for each ALD.
2. After lengthy group discussion, the ERP reached preliminary agreement regarding how to revise, edit, modify, and reassign each statement.
3. With the assistance of an editor, the ERP revised the statements and drafted a narrative, rather than bulleted version of the ALDs.
4. Additional polishing of the narrative version of the descriptions took place following the ERP meeting. The polished version was distributed to the ERP for further consideration. After minor adjustments, members agreed to approve them as the recommended version of the ALDs.

The ERP made every effort to strike a balance between implementing all of the recommendations offered by the focus groups, and maintaining a cohesive progression of skill development across the grades. In general, ERP members addressed the specific concerns expressed by the focus groups. In nearly all instances, the revisions followed the recommendations from the focus groups. In a few cases, however, the panel agreed that the recommendation was inappropriate and was not implemented. Revisions used fewer jargon-type terms and created unambiguous statements. The group was attentive to providing adequate coverage for the subject area, as outlined in the Framework. The Civics ERP systematically addressed each content domain outlined in the Civics Framework. Members considered skill progression across all three grades to assure that the level was developmentally appropriate. The review process was thorough and the revisions were extensive. A complete set of modifications was compiled for each of the expert review panels. The following is a brief summary of the general changes made to the descriptions by the ERP.

General Modifications Made by the Expert Review Panels:

- The degree of difficulty was adjusted as recommended.
- The language was simplified.
- Concepts were clarified.
- Separate statements describing related ideas were consolidated.
- The distinction between levels was enhanced.
- The developmental progression of skills across levels and grades was improved.
- The level of detail in the descriptions was made consistent across levels and grades.

Step 3: Evaluating the Revised ALDs

Once the recommended versions of the ALDs were finalized, ACT requested comments about the recommended ALDs from the original focus group members and key people who had been involved in the development of the NAEP for writing and civics.

Collecting Opinions from Focus Groups

The original focus group members were asked to review the modified ALDs. Eighty-five participants were mailed copies of the revised ALDs and the generic NAGB policy definitions of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The focus group members were informed that a telephone interviewer would call them to ask their opinions of the recommended descriptions. Their opinion should be based on the reasonableness and usefulness of the revised descriptions, relative to the NAGB policy definitions. A toll-free telephone number was provided to members for returning calls to ACT.

A copy of the telephone survey is presented as Exhibit 1 for civics and Exhibit 2 for writing. Results of the survey can be found in Tables 3 and 4 for civics focus group members, and in Tables 5 and 6 for writing focus group members.

The results of the telephone survey indicate that the modified ALDs were generally well received by the persons who served on the focus groups.

- When asked if the revised ALDs seem reasonable, 89.2% of the civics members and 84.6% of the writing members responded positively.
- When asked if the revised ALDs are clear and easily understood, 78.4% of the civics members and 79.5% of the writing members replied "yes."
- When asked if the revised ALDs reflect the three achievement levels, between 94.6% - 100% of civics members agreed (depending upon the level), and between 84.6% - 94.9 % writing members agreed.

When asked if additional changes to the ALDs are necessary, 40.5% of the civics members and 48.7% of the writing members replied "yes." Comments from these individuals consisted mainly of editorial type suggestions for the statements. Few made recommendations for changes that would likely lead to significant alterations of the levels. Although the percentages of participants who advocated additional changes seem rather high, 78.4% of civics members and 82.1% of writing members recommended that the ALDs be adopted as they appeared in the survey.

The writing survey included one question that did not appear in the civics survey. This question (#7) asked participants to evaluate the descriptions for 8th grade Basic and Proficient, relative to one another. Specifically, members were asked whether there appears to be a "gap" in the progression of skill development described by the two levels. Of the 29 respondents to this question, 10 (34.5%) said that there was a "gap." Basic seemed too low and Proficient too high for Grade Eight.

Reviews by Content Committees

ACT requested comments about the recommended ALDs from key people who had been involved in the development of the Assessment for writing and civics. Members of the NAEP Standing Committee, the NAEP Item Development Committee, and the NAEP Framework Committee for each subject were asked to review the modified ALDs. Forty civics participants and 15 writing participants were contacted. Each was mailed copies of the recommended ALDs, the Framework, and the generic NAGB policy definitions of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The content committee members were asked to review the materials and make comments and suggestions for improvement to the recommended descriptions. A copy of the survey is presented as Exhibit 3 for civics and Exhibit 4 for writing. Results of the survey of civics content committee members are in Table 7 and of writing members in Table 8.

Comments were received from 26 persons in civics and 7 in writing. The results indicate that the modified ALDs were generally well received by the persons who served on the content committees.

- When asked if the revised ALDs should be adopted without substantive changes, 73.1% of the civics members and 71.4% of the writing members said "yes."
- Of those who recommended changes, one or two members thought the descriptions were too high for some grades and levels, while one or two other members thought they were too low.
- The greatest number of recommendations was made for the 4th grade Advanced level in civics. Four members thought that description was too demanding.

Analyses comparing the Revised ALDs with the Framework and Item Pool

The preliminary ALDs for both writing and civics have changed substantially as a result of the finalizing process. It is important to ascertain that the revised descriptions have not changed to such an extent that they no longer reflect the content described in the Assessment Framework. An analysis of the civics content areas as they relate to the revised civics ALDs revealed that all five areas of civic knowledge, as defined in the Framework were described by the revised ALDs. More specifically, the ALDs describe the civics content outlined in the Framework for all three grade levels, for all three achievement levels, and for a broad range of intellectual skills.

Further analysis was done to classify the items in the civics exercise pool according to the revised achievement level descriptions. Sixty-five different descriptive statements were examined across the three grades. There were only two sentences – one at 4th grade Basic and the other at 8th grade Basic – that had no exercises associated with them. The findings of this analysis are summarized below:

- The overall match between the civics item pool and the revised achievement level descriptors is strong.
- Some descriptive statements can be associated with four or five assessment items, while others can be associated with twenty items.
- A limited number of items from the exercise pool could not be directly associated with a descriptor.

At each grade, over 90% of the exercise pools could be classified successfully according to the revised achievement level descriptions. The number of exercises that could not be classified was small. At grade four, 6 of the 90 items could not be classified as described by the ALDs. At grade eight, 10 of the 151 items could not be classified and at grade twelve, 7 of the 152 items could not be classified. The majority of the unclassified exercises in grades 8 and 12 were designed to measure students' abilities to interpret information presented in tables, graphs, or charts. This skill is included in the assessment specifications, but not in the ALDs. The other items that could not be classified measured students' abilities in different areas that were not described in the ALDs.

Conclusion of the ALD Finalizing Process

The 1998 achievement levels descriptions have received a great deal of attention, considerably more than has been given to ALDs in previous NAEP' achievement levels-setting processes. The method of collecting opinions regarding the ALDs hass been thorough and diligent. Great effort has been given to incorporating the collected opinions into the recommended ALDs.

The ALDs have been further polished as a result of the continuing analyses comparing the revised ALDs with the item pool. Statements have been added to the 8th and 12th grade descriptions related to students' abilities to interpret information presented in tables, graphs, and charts. Also, an explanation of testing conditions has been added as a preamble to the writing ALDs.

At the NAGB meeting in August, 1998 the revised achievement levels descriptions were approved for ACT to use for the NAEP pilot studies and the ALS meetings. NAGB is scheduled to decide on adoption of the achievement levels for the 1998 NAEP in May 1999.

Table 1

Composition of Civics Focus Group Participants

City	Teachers			Nonteacher Educators			General Public	Gender		Minority
	4th	8th	12th	4th	8th	12th		Male	Female	
Boston (n=12)	2	2	3	1	1	1	2	10	2	2
Atlanta (n=11)	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	2	9	4
St. Louis (n=8)	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	6	2	1
Portland (n=10)	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	7	1
Totals (n=41)	7	7	9	4	4	4	6	21	20	8

Table 2

Composition of Writing Focus Group Participants

City	Teachers			Nonteacher Educators			General Public	Gender		Minority
	4th	8th	12th	4th	8th	12th		Male	Female	
Boston (n=11)	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	3	8	1
Atlanta (n=11)	2	3	3	1	1	1	1	0	11	5
St. Louis (n=11)	2	3	3	1	0	1	1	1	10	4
Portland (n=11)	2	2	2	1	0	1	3	3	8	1
Totals (n=44)	8	9	10	4	2	5	6	7	37	11

Table 3

Civics Focus Group Follow-Up Survey Results by Location

Question	Response	Overall (n=37)		Location							
				Boston (n=11)		Atlanta (n=11)		St. Louis (n=7)		Portland (n=8)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	33	89.2	10	90.9	10	90.9	7	100	6	75
	No	4	10.8	1	9.1	1	9.1	-	-	2	25
2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	29	78.4	8	72.7	9	81.8	6	85.7	6	75
	No	8	21.6	3	27.3	2	18.2	1	14.3	2	25
3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary? ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) ☐ No	Yes	15	40.5	4	36.4	3	27.3	3	42.9	5	62.5
	No	22	59.5	7	63.6	8	72.7	4	57.1	3	37.5
4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	35	94.6	11	100	10	90	7	100	7	87.5
	No	2	5.4	0	0	1	10	0	0	1	12.5
	Too High	1	50	-	-	0	0	-	-	1	100
	Too Low	1	50	-	-	1	100	-	-	0	0
5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	37	100	11	100	11	100	7	100	8	100
	No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Question	Response	Overall (n=37)		Location							
				Boston (n=11)		Atlanta (n=11)		St. Louis (n=7)		Portland (n=8)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	36	97.3	10	90.9	11	100	7	100	8	100
	No	1	2.7	1	9.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	1	100	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	0	100	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	29	78.4	7	63.6	10	90.9	7	100	3	37.5
	No	8	21.6	4	36.4	1	9.1	0	0	5	62.5

Table 4

Civics Focus Group Follow-Up Survey Results by Grade and Type

Question	Response	Grade Level						Panelist Type					
		4 (n=10)		8 (n=8)		12 (n=19)		Teacher (n=21)		Nonteacher (n=12)		General Public (n=4)	
		n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	8	80	8	100	17	10.5	19	90.5	10	16.7	4	100
	No	2	20	0	0	2	10.5	2	9.5	2	83.3	0	0
2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	6	60	7	87.5	16	84.2	16	76.2	9	75	4	100
	No	4	40	1	12.5	3	15.8	5	23.8	3	25	0	0
3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary? ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) ☐ No	Yes	6	60	2	25.0	7	36.8	7	33.3	5	41.7	3	75
	No	4	40	6	75.0	12	63.2	14	66.7	7	58.3	1	25
4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level? ☐ Yes	Yes	8	80	8	100	19	100	19	90.5	12	100	4	100
	No	2	20	0	0	0	0	2	9.5	0	0	0	0
☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Too High	1	50	-	-		-	1	50	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	1	50	-	-		-	1	50	-	-	-	-

Question	Response	Grade Level						Panelist Type					
		4 (n=10)		8 (n=8)		12 (n=19)		Teacher (n=21)		Nonteacher (n=12)		General Public (n=4)	
		n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	10	100	8	100	19	100	21	100	12	100	4	100
	No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	9	90	8	100	19	100	20	95.2	12	100	4	100
	No	1	10	0	0	0	0	1	4.8	0	0	0	0
	Too High	1	100	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	0	0	-	-	-	-	0	0	-	-	-	-
7. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	7	70	6	75	16	84.2	17	81.0	9	75	3	75
	No	3	30	2	25	3	15.8	4	19.0	3	25	1	25

Table 5

Writing Focus Group Follow-Up Survey Results by Location

Question	Response	Overall (n=39)		Location							
				Boston (n=11)		Atlanta (n=8)		St. Louis (n=10)		Portland (n=10)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	33	84.6	8	72.7	7	87.5	9	90	9	90
	No	6	15.4	3	72.7	1	12.5	1	10	1	10
2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	31	79.5	8	72.7	7	87.5	9	90	7	70
	No	8	20.5	3	27.3	1	12.5	1	10	3	30
3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary? ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) ☐ No	Yes	19	48.7	8	72.7	3	37.5	3	30	5	50
	No	20	51.3	3	27.3	5	62.5	7	70	5	50
4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	33	84.6	7	63.6	8	100	8	80	10	100
	No	5	12.8	3	27.3	0	0	2	20	0	0
	Too High	3	60	2	100	-	-	1	50	-	-
	Too Low	1	20	0	0	-	-	1	50	-	-
5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	36	92.3	8	72.7	8	100	10	100	10	100
	No	2	5.1	2	18.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	1	100	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-

Question	Response	Overall (n=39)		Location							
				Boston (n=11)		Atlanta (n=8)		St. Louis (n=10)		Portland (n=10)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	37	94.9	10	90.9	7	87.5	10	100	10	100
	No	2	5.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. You don't have to answer this next question if you feel uncomfortable making the judgment about 8th grade descriptions. But when you were looking over the descriptions for 8th grade, did you notice a gap between Basic and Proficient? More specifically, did Basic seem too low and Proficient too high? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	10	25.6	3	27.3	2	25	4	40	1	10
	No	19	48.7	5	45.5	4	50	3	30	7	70
8. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	32	82.1	7	63.6	7	87.5	9	90	9	90
	No	6	15.4	3	27.3	1	12.5	1	10	1	10

Table 6

Writing Focus Group Follow-Up Survey Results by Grade and Type

Question	Response	Grade Level						Panelist Type					
		4 (n=9)		8 (n=11)		12 (n=18)		Teacher (n=24)		Nonteacher (n=10)		General Public (n=5)	
		n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	6	66.7	11	100	15	83.3	20	83.3	8	80	5	100
	No	3	33.3	0	0	3	16.7	4	16.7	2	20	0	0
2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, please explain.)	Yes	7	77.8	11	100	12	66.7	20	83.3	7	70	4	80
	No	2	22.2	0	0	6	33.3	4	16.7	3	30	1	10
3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary? ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) ☐ No	Yes	6	66.7	3	27.3	10	55.6	9	37.5	6	60	4	80
	No	3	33.3	8	72.7	8	44.4	15	62.5	4	40	1	20
4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level? ☐ Yes	Yes	6	66.7	10	90.9	16	88.9	20	83.3	9	90	4	80
	No	3	33.3	1	9.1	1	5.6	3	12.5	1	10	1	20
☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Too High	2	66.7	0	0	1	100	2	66.7	0	0	-	-
	Too Low	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	1	33.3	0	0	-	-

Question	Response	Grade Level						Panelist Type					
		4 (n=9)		8 (n=11)		12 (n=18)		Teacher (n=24)		Nonteacher (n=10)		General Public (n=5)	
		n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	9	100	10	90.9	16	88.9	22	91.7	9	90	5	100
	No	0	0	1	9.1	1	5.6	1	4.2	1	10	0	0
	Too High	-	-	1	100	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	-	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	-	-	-	-
6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level? ☐ Yes ☐ No (If no, are they: ☐ Too High? ☐ Too Low?)	Yes	9	100	11	100	16	88.9	22	91.7	10	100	5	100
	No	0	0	0	0	2	11.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Too High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Too Low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. You don't have to answer this next question if you feel uncomfortable making the judgment about 8th grade descriptions. But when you were looking over the descriptions for 8th grade, did you notice a gap between Basic and Proficient? More specifically, did Basic seem too low and Proficient too high? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	4	44.4	4	36.4	2	11.1	6	25.0	3	30	1	20
	No	2	22.2	6	54.5	10	55.6	10	41.7	6	60	3	60
8. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received? ☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes	6	66.7	11	100	14	77.8	20	83.3	7	70	5	100
	No	3	33.3	0	0	3	16.7	3	12.5	3	30	0	0

Table 7

Recommendations to Adopt Civics Achievement Levels Descriptions

Recommend adoption of the civics ALDs without substantive changes	19 (73.1%)
Recommend substantive changes in some of the civics ALDs	7 (26.9%)

Descriptions recommended for substantive changes

		Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12
Too High	Basic	2	0	1
	Proficient	0	0	1
	Advanced	4	1	0
Too Low	Basic	2	0	2
	Proficient	0	0	2
	Advanced	0	0	0

Table 8

Recommendations to Adopt Writing Achievement Levels Descriptions

Recommend adoption of the civics ALDs without substantive changes	5 (71.4%)
Recommend substantive changes in some of the civics ALDs	2 (28.6%)

Descriptions recommended for substantive changes

		Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12
Too High	Basic	0	0	1
	Proficient	1	1	1
	Advanced	1	1	1
Too Low	Basic	0	1	0
	Proficient	0	0	0
	Advanced	0	0	0

Exhibit 1

Telephone Survey for Civics Focus Groups

(prefix) (fname) (lname) (type)
(address)
(city), (state) (zip)
(phone)

A. Hello. My name is _____ and I'm calling for ACT. The reason for my call is to ask your opinion about the recommended achievement level descriptions for the NAEP/National Assessment of Educational Progress in Civics. The interview should take about five minutes. Is this a good time to talk to you?

If no, ask when to call back.

B. Have you received a copy of the recommended achievement level descriptions?
- ☐ Yes (If yes, go on to next question.)
- ☐ No (If no, tell person we will send materials and ask for address where s/he wants materials sent. Tell person s/he will be called back for an interview soon after s/he has received materials.)

C. Have you had a chance to review them?
- ☐ Yes (If yes, go on to next question.)
- ☐ No (If no, ask when to call back after s/he has had a chance to review materials.

_____

D. I'd like to ask you some questions about what you think about the descriptions. I'll be taking notes while we talk, so there could be some pauses during our conversation while I write down what you're saying.

My first question is:

1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No (If no, please explain.) _____

   _____

2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No (If no, please explain.) _____

   _____

3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary?
   ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) _____

   _____

   ☐ No

4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?

5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?)

6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?)

And the final question,

7. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received (title of materials: *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Civics)*?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

Thank you for your help.

Exhibit 2

Telephone Survey for Writing Focus Groups

(prefix) (fname) (lname) (type)
(address)
(city), (state) (zip)
(phone)

A. Hello. My name is _____ and I'm calling for ACT. The reason for my call is to ask your opinion about the recommended achievement level descriptions for the NAEP/National Assessment of Educational Progress in Writing. The interview should take about five minutes. Is this a good time to talk to you?

If no, ask when to call back.

B. Have you received a copy of the recommended achievement level descriptions?
- ☐ Yes (If yes, go on to next question.)
- ☐ No (If no, tell person we will send materials and ask for address where s/he wants materials sent. Tell person s/he will be called back for an interview soon after s/he has received materials.)

C. Have you had a chance to review them?
- ☐ Yes (If yes, go on to next question.)
- ☐ No (If no, ask when to call back after s/he has had a chance to review materials.

_____

D. I'd like to ask you some questions about what you think about the descriptions. I'll be taking notes while we talk, so there could be some pauses during our conversation while I write down what you're saying.

My first question is:

1. Do the achievement level descriptions seem reasonable?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No (If no, please explain.) _____

   _____

2. Are the achievement level descriptions clear and easily understood?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No (If no, please explain.) _____

   _____

3. Are additional changes to the achievement level descriptions necessary?
   ☐ Yes (If yes, please explain.) _____

   _____

   ☐ No

4. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect partial mastery at the Basic level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?

5. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect solid academic performance at the Proficient level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?)

6. Do the achievement level descriptions reflect superior performance at the Advanced level?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No (If no, are they:
      ☐ Too High?
      ☐ Too Low?)

7. You don't have to answer this next question if you feel uncomfortable making the judgment about 8th grade descriptions. But when you were looking over the descriptions for 8th grade, did you notice a gap between Basic and Proficient? More specifically, did Basic seem too low and Proficient too high?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

And the final question,

8. Should the recommended achievement levels descriptions be adopted as they appear in the materials you received (title of materials: *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Writing)*?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

Thank you for your help.

Exhibit 3

NAEP Civics Content Committee Survey

March 25, 1998

(prefix) (fname) (lname) (type)
(title)
(organization)
(address)
(city), (state) (zip)

Dear (prefix) (lname):

In preparing our report to NAGB, we have determined that we need specific responses from key people, such as yourself, who have been involved in the development of the NAEP for Civics. NAGB is sure to want your input on this matter!

Please take a few moments to review the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Civics* and the NAGB policy definitions for Basic, Proficient, and Advanced performance. We have enclosed a copy of each, so you do not need to tax your memory or search around your office to find them.

Please check the appropriate response to indicate your opinion about the reasonableness and usefulness of the recommended achievement levels descriptions and how well they reflect the NAGB policy definitions.

☐ I recommend adoption of the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Civics*. In my opinion, no substantive changes need to made to the descriptions. [Please skip to the instructions below.]

☐ I recommend substantive changes in some of the descriptions. These changes are necessary before I could recommend adoption of the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Civics*. [Please respond to the following questions.]

If you think changes are necessary, please indicate which description(s) you think should be modified and the general direction of change needed. "Too high" means that you think that description is too demanding and that it would result in a standard that is "too high" to be a reasonable reflection of the level. "Too low" means that you think the description is not demanding enough and that it would result in a standard that is "too low" to be a reasonable reflection of the level.

Grade 4	**Basic** (Partial Mastery)	**Proficient** (Solid Performance)	**Advanced** (Superior Performance)
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐
Grade 8			
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐

Grade 12			
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐

PLEASE RETURN THE SURVEY AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE, OR BY APRIL 6.

Your comments on specific recommendations will be appreciated. If you have already sent your recommendations, you do not need to repeat them here. If you wish to telephone, fax or E-mail your comments; please do so. A self-addressed, prepaid envelope is enclosed for you to return this form by mail.

Telephone: (800) 525-6930 Fax: 319/337-1497 E-mail: hanick@act.org

Thank you in advance for your continued assistance and support for the Civics NAEP!

Yours truly,

Susan Cooper Loomis

Susan Cooper Loomis, Ph.D.
NAEP Project Director
Research Division

Exhibit 4

NAEP Writing Content Committee Survey

March 25, 1998

(prefix) (fname) (lname) (type)
(title)
(organization)
(address)
(city), (state) (zip)

Dear (prefix) (lname):

In preparing our report to NAGB, we have determined that we need specific responses from key people, such as yourself, who have been involved in the development of the NAEP for Writing. NAGB is sure to want your input on this matter!

Please take a few moments to review the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Writing* and the NAGB policy definitions for Basic, Proficient, and Advanced performance. We have enclosed a copy of each, so you do not need to tax your memory or search around your office to find them.

Please check the appropriate response to indicate your opinion about the reasonableness and usefulness of the recommended achievement levels descriptions and how well they reflect the NAGB policy definitions.

☐ I recommend adoption of the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Writing*. In my opinion, no substantive changes need to made to the descriptions. [Please skip to the instructions below.]

☐ I recommend substantive changes in some of the descriptions. These changes are necessary before I could recommend adoption of the *Recommended Achievement Levels Descriptions for Writing*. [Please respond to the following questions.]

If you think changes are necessary, please indicate which description(s) you think should be modified and the general direction of change needed. "Too high" means that you think that description is too demanding and that it would result in a standard that is "too high" to be a reasonable reflection of the level. "Too low" means that you think the description is not demanding enough and that it would result in a standard that is "too low" to be a reasonable reflection of the level.

Grade 4	**Basic** (Partial Mastery)	**Proficient** (Solid Performance)	**Advanced** (Superior Performance)
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐
Grade 8			
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐

Grade 12			
Acceptable	☐	☐	☐
Too high	☐	☐	☐
Too low	☐	☐	☐

PLEASE RETURN THE SURVEY AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE, OR BY APRIL 6.

Your comments on specific recommendations will be appreciated. If you have already sent your recommendations, you do not need to repeat them here. If you wish to telephone, fax or E-mail your comments, please do so. A self-addressed, prepaid envelope is enclosed for you to return this form by mail.

Telephone: (800) 525-6930 Fax: 319/337-1497 E-mail: hanick@act.org

Thank you in advance for your continued assistance and support for the Writing NAEP!

Yours truly,

Susan Cooper Loomis

Susan Cooper Loomis, Ph.D.
NAEP Project Director
Research Division